

Fruitfulness in Christ

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[0:00] I must confess as I look at this passage, I am what you might call a brown thumb! I am actually unable by any means to make anything grow.

! In fact, someone recently had gone back to Canada and was like, Ash, I'm going to give you this plant of mine, but no, it is dead. They can be hurt.

It's sad, it's depressing because it's a reminder of the friendship, which is not dead, but it could be herbs, it could be fruit, it could be even a succulent.

I can't bring it to grow. And the reality is when you buy any plant, whatever it is, the goal for it is fruitfulness, isn't it? The goal for it is to grow.

And who doesn't want it to grow? Me, apparently. And you see, the picture that's been read out for us is that being in Christ is like the relationship between a vine and branches.

[1:01] And in this series that has been called In Christ, we've looked at the nature of being united with Jesus. How it is so unchangeable, this unbreakable bond, all because of the work of Christ.

And this time we're looking at this beautiful metaphor of, again, what that union should look like.

Have a look at verse 5. I am the vine, you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

Jesus, the same God who was there at the beginning, affirms that you are united to him as a vine is with a branch.

And isn't a vine just such a beautiful image? Because what should be etched into our minds are vines that are just overflowing and it just keeps growing and growing and growing and growing on the wall or even on a wooden stake.

[2:09] It's got this growth, it's got this vitality that is just all-encompassing. That's the relationship that you have with Christ.

The power of being connected to Jesus, the vine, means fruitfulness. It means that fruitfulness will happen.

A vine that keeps growing and growing and growing. That if you keep the branches healthy by being connected, they will bear fruit.

And so too, therefore, is his desire for you. Verse 2. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

And in verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you. And appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.

[3:15] Friends, bearing fruit is the obvious reality for the Christian here in John 15. And what's beautiful that's added here is that God has chosen you. He's chosen you.

He's predestined you to be faithful. To be fruitful. That his purpose and the reason for your fruitfulness is because he chose you and made you for it.

Because fruitfulness is the mark of a Christian or a sign, if you will. Earlier, Nick preached on being made dead and alive in Christ.

And in very much the same way that Paul says that you are now dead and you have been made alive in Christ, you are to stop sinning, living as though you are dead.

And Jesus here says, because you are a branch, you who trust in Jesus are a branch that is rooted and connected to the source of life and growth, bear fruit.

[4:24] Jesus says that you have God's spirit that lives in you, which he assures those who trust him that you will be fruitful.

And so fruit is a non-negotiable. It's promised. You can't say, I'm just a branch attached to the true vine and I'll choose to bear my fruit rather than Jesus' fruit.

And let me make it really clear. What makes you a Christian is not your fruit. What makes you a Christian is the fact, verse 3, that you were made clean, heard the word of Jesus being the way, the truth and the life, being forgiven and given new life by your confidence being in Jesus Christ. And then what flows from this is fruitfulness. Because you know what God commanded humanity as he established them on this earth?

He says to you and I, Genesis chapter 1, verse 28, God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and multiply.

[5:42] Be fruitful. It's our original call, our original command. And so we have to ask ourselves, what is the fruitfulness that we have been designed for, that Jesus is looking for?

Because the reality is for most of us, we are in a success culture. If you think you're not, then try again and look again. Think about just Chatswood.

Think about just Chatswood. You want your kids to succeed and be happy. And you don't have to look so far around in Chatswood to find a Turing College at every corner of this city.

There's options for extracurricular after school. There are school buses, I won't name which school, in our very local area that have the slogans, watch us change the world.

Before high school graduates graduate, there will be business and career pathways advertised to them.

[6:47] Because we want them to succeed in the world. And you see, the danger for us is that the fruitfulness that you and I live and breathe is very much not the same fruitfulness that Jesus desires for your children, your grandchildren, your spouse, and even for yourself.

Notice what Jesus says about the purpose in verse 12. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

And to understand the fruit, Jesus tells us what it's for. Number one, it's not for us. The fruitfulness is to glorify God.

It's to make him big. It's to make him great. Because he is worthy of all praise. And number two, it's outwardly that our fruit is to be a demonstration of Christ's work in us.

In other words, the fruitfulness that we are seeing here is the growth, the total transformation of the life of a Christian to become more and more and more like Jesus.

[8:16] Christians call this sanctification, the process of being made more and more to the image of Jesus Christ. And it's not an instant one, but as we see in this passage, it is a promised one.

And so fruitfulness, sanctification, it's all of it. It's all the transformation. It's growing in the fruit of the Spirit. Patience, love, kindness, self-control. Christ-likeness.

It is growing in love for God and others. It is bearing fruit of seeing other people come to follow Christ. But also, yes, the fruitfulness is not for us.

It is for God's glory. It is outwardly. But did you see in verse 11? It's a reality that the Christian ought to also have joy from. Growing to be like Jesus.

Transformation, fruitfulness, sanctification is a joy gifted by Jesus. Verse 11, I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and so that my joy may be complete.

[9:28] I wonder if you've got friends who've told you after you've shared about, I'm a follower of Jesus, I go to church. And they say, you know what, that sounds like a great idea.

I'll check out Jesus. But, you know, I'll start obeying all the commands after I stop partying. Maybe I'll take Jesus more seriously when I get older or when I have kids.

Maybe we'll focus on the church part after the HSC is finished or after this big work season.

Because I just don't want Jesus and the Bible to squeeze out all the joy of what I want to do.

See, Jesus pushes the opposite idea, doesn't he? He's not withholding the secret to joy. He says that keeping his commands, glorifying him is for our joy.

It's for your benefit to glorify him. And so what Jesus calls us to do is to lean into his joy as surpassing worth than the joy that this world has to offer.

[10:37] Lean into the fruitfulness that he longs for you. And so where does fruitfulness start? Where does that begin? Fruitfulness begins in remaining.

Verse 4. Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. You see, Jesus doubles down here. Not only is remaining a method, it is the only method.

Remaining in Christ. If you want to be fruitful in Christ, you are to remain in Christ. And the sense of remain here that we ought to see is it's a heart, will, and mind that is wholly fixed and united with

Christ's own heart, will, and mind.

As much as a branch looks like the vine and the vine is full of branches, our whole heart and affections and desires become consumed by Christ.

[11:46] In other words, remaining is actually an active reality. It's not a passive one. Remaining in Christ is not reaching a destination as much as embracing the destination that you are in.

I was chatting to a school chaplain and they asked me, hey, do you know this kid? He says he goes to your youth group and he also comes to my lunchtime group.

And I'm like, great, what was his name? And they said it and I was like, oh, never heard of them before. And I started feeling bad because I was like, oh, my goodness, my memory's starting to go quite early.

I don't even know my own youth. So I checked our attendance list, searched up the kid and realised that they actually turned up twice, three terms ago, but were still claiming to be a member here at St Paul's.

And I was like, that's sweet that they consider St Paul's to be their church. But also, they don't really go to our church.

[12:54] But somehow, that's how you and I treat remaining in Christ. You see following Jesus as more of a title that you have, the credentials, the bachelor, the masters under your name that you carry around, claiming the name of Jesus, claiming the title of Christian, claiming the title of Christian, rather than be mastered by Jesus.

You see, the vine imagery is so powerful that the remaining is not only us to him, but in what Jesus does for us.

This four, remain in me as I also remain in you. To be a Christian, you must be mastered by Jesus and his words.

Look at verse 7 and 10. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, and verse 10. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

Friends, there's something synonymous about loving Jesus, remaining in him and his words. You might be new to Jesus.

[14:20] Some of you might be keen to check out Jesus. You love the forgiveness and love of Jesus, but you're not quite sure about certain other parts of the Bible that you've heard.

I just want to encourage you that having faith in Jesus, as you discover who he is, is taking him at his word, that his way indeed is better.

I hear the warning in verse 6. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burn. So yes, when you reject God, you reject the God who rightly deserves all the glory and praise.

He deserves your attention, but also, you harm yourself. Have you thought it that way before?

[15:31] Sin harms you in a way that you might not see, but it's harming you. It's still hurting you because you are broken from the life source.

You are broken from the true vine. It's no benefit to you. And you see, the difference in remaining in Christ is this.

I must confess, I'm not organized. I did have something here, ready to go, but I don't have it with me. I want you just to imagine that you've got a Tupperware box.

That Tupperware box is you. Inside of you is another Tupperware box that contains the Holy Spirit. Have a look. Remember, God remains in you. And in John 14, the Holy Spirit is promised to those who trust in him. And that Tupperware box is to be in Christ, which means at the very center of you is the Holy Spirit.

[16:51] And you on the outside are being encompassed by Christ. And so, if you can imagine that image that should have been brought by Ash, do you see yourself that you are subsumed, mastered by the Savior, the Savior remains in you, making you remain in himself?

It's like those babushka dolls. You're the second, the middle one. Friends, what that means is 100% fruitfulness.

That you can bear fruit, that you will bear fruit just by remaining in him. That the way that you slay your sin, the way that you open your heart is in Jesus.

In Jesus alone. It's by his grace alone that you have been saved, but it's also by grace that you will change. God's grace, his life transforming power is a promise.

Goodness, I love Romans 8. Romans 8 is such an incredible passage. You should go check it out if you've never done it. But in verse 11, did you know, did you know, it says that you've got Jesus' spirit, the same spirit that brought Jesus Christ from the dead.

[18:10] and in him, you've got the same resurrection power. And so remain in him. What other fount will ever give you eternal life?

What other vine holds you in his loving arms and calls you friend than the true vine? This is the creator God we're talking about.

He is the unchanging God, the one who was and is and is to come. And so every time that you look elsewhere, you commit idolatry and you are not remaining in him.

And so in verse 5, Jesus continues saying, apart from me, you can do nothing. Friends, don't believe that you can bear fruit by yourself. Don't think you can change without the work of Christ in you.

And yet in the world of self-help books, the right measure of self-care, the perfect self-determining strategies for success, that you perhaps have imported a view of self in the way that you grow as a Christian.

[19:25] But friends, you are helpless to make that change. no more ounce of striving will grow you. Every time you rely on yourself for your own growth, you are not remaining in him.

And perhaps the way that we think about it is that if we just have a little injection of Jesus inside of us, everything will go well. Take this pie chart as an example of the time a person has.

take it as you've got a range of things that you could do. You could be doing work, leisure, health, family, friends, rest, parties, your personal finances.

And what we've done eventually is that we've actually gone, this is my whole life, but then let's play the idea that you suddenly become a Christian and you realise that pie chart has to change and you have to add more things.

You need to include things like Bible reading, you need to include church, prayer, serving, and you're like, this is really overwhelming. How am I meant to fit this in? I know I need to grow, but I also have work to do.

[20:40] And so maybe if I hear a sermon, maybe that will make me grow. I feel a little guilty about my Bible reading, so I'm going to read my Bible. I'm going to go back to church so that maybe I'm back in God's good books.

But as you think about it, what you'll find out very quickly as you value and prioritise things is that whatever you value, whatever is important to you, urgent to you, will be whatever takes up the measure of that pie.

You'll adjust the proportions of leisure, work, family, sport, based off you. And so perhaps the better image is the spoke of a wheel and the car's logo on that wheel.

All the spokes resemble the proportions of your life, work, kids, rest, all of that. But at the very centre of the wheel is you.

Whatever you value sets the size of that portion. But friends, fruitfulness, sanctification, sanctification is having Jesus at the centre of the wheel because all the spokes connect to him.

[21:56] Putting Jesus first is simply putting him in the right slot of the wheel. Not a portion of it, but in the centre of it. He'll dictate the size, he'll detect the proportion and what is even in the wheel and what is not.

Because when Jesus is at the centre, do you understand that you are remaining in him? And when Jesus is not, do you understand that you are not remaining in Christ?

When you, the individual, are at the centre, you are just a branch. Just like the many individual branches in this world, not connected to the vine.

Verse 4, again, remain in me as I also remain in you. Do you not realise it's the living God who is living and active inside of you that is making the sanctification happen?

He's the one who's growing your heart for worship. He's the one that is growing you to be more like him. And anything that you do, anything that looks like good works, anything that looks like glorifying God, is simply you partaking in what God has already been doing in you.

[23:24] And so instead of asking what benefits me, what makes me look good, what makes my worth, my goals, what works for my preferences, you ask instead, how does this honour Christ?

How will this express in love for others? Does this decision that I make remain and abide with Christ more and more?

How does that apply for every decision in my life? And so I've started to ask this question of my Christian brothers and sisters when it comes to someone, and a friend asked me of this as well, and it was so helpful for me.

How has being a disciple of Jesus shaped how you think about X, Y, Z? With every life decision you make, work, jobs, all of it, how has being a disciple of Jesus shaped how you think about a certain issue?

Friends, when Jesus is at the centre of the spoke, we realise that this is the fruitfulness that he longs for and that your union with him assures it. And perhaps you're someone in the room that wants to bear fruit.

[24 : 43] Perhaps you're someone who longs for change in your life and in your circumstances. You've prayed long and hard for that change. I think Jesus has encouragement for you that perhaps if you're not bearing fruit, have a look at verse two.

While every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You might be going through what might be the pruning, the cleansing, the trimming that will lead to the fruitfulness that the vine dresser is longing for.

But friends, don't, don't, don't, don't cut yourself off from the root that will solve you. Because we live in a world that often says your own way.

People grow in different ways, learn in different ways and those things are true, yet we import that wrongly into our view as a Christian as we grow. You might think as you see someone who's a wise sage, I'm not as on fire, I'm not an on fire Christian like them.

They're just a different species every time you think of that pastor. No, that's not true, friends. You have the same source.

[26 : 05] In fact, you are more connected to that person in Christ than you are with a blood relative of yours who is not in Christ. In fact, you are more likely because you are in Christ to be more like that on fire person than the other.

And so in whatever way the Lord will, you are to become more like Christ. Go on and be encouraged by someone who is on fire and change. Friends, there is only one true vine.

Don't go chasing another vine. Those vines won't give the vitality and flourishing life that you long for. They might give you fruit, that thrill, that mist and whim of pleasure, but there's none that has died for you so that you might have true life.

Because Jesus is the true vine. So remain in him, long for the transformation, and remain in a way that longs to be an on fire Christian. Remain in a way that puts away the selfishness in your life.

Remain. The question is, are you remaining? Do you remain in his words? Because it says in verse 7, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, that the way you walk closer to the Lord, in the vitally interconnected life, in the same manner of that overgrowing vine, is that you hear God's word.

[27 : 35] And you might say, Ash, that's such an easy one. Solution to every Christian problem, you say it again, it's just to read the Bible. No, by no means am I saying that.

Friends, if you're reading the Bible trying to get holy, less greedy, less lustful, become a better person, more loving, more patient, to get somewhere in life, you are missing the point.

Read it because the holy scriptures have revealed to you the living word, Christ himself. Read it not to be fruitful, read it to remain. Read trusting that Jesus will work on the inward change in you as he has done that time and time and time and time and time again for his people.

And so can I reverse the question to you? Do you believe that Jesus himself is the solution to your very inward need, the very change that you are longing for?

Not Jesus solving it by what you want, but Jesus himself. Have a look at the rest of the verse. And then ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

[28 : 48] There are many things that God welcomes me to pray and ask him, but I just love this. I love that he promises me that you and I will grow in obedience as we ask for it.

He will grow the fruitfulness of your remaining and your obedience. obedience. In fact, you are his fruit. The vine dresser wants to grow you, shape you, and he wants you to commit and give your life to him, for you are the fruits of his labor.

Jesus delights in the fruit that he is working in you. In Hebrews 13, verse 35, it says, through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

Let's pray in light of that reality. Father God, in Christ, you have promised us change. Get rid of the idols and distractions that hinder our remaining in you, and we ask that you might enable a focus our eyes on you so deep and so firm, a grasp that will not let go, rather than ourselves. We thank you that you are a God that will finish what you start. And so we ask that you might help us trust in the promise that you will make us how you have designed us to be.
[30 : 28] We ask that we remain in you, knowing that you remain in us. Amen.